TWELFTH-NIGHT

at the

Century Club.

MDCCCLIX.

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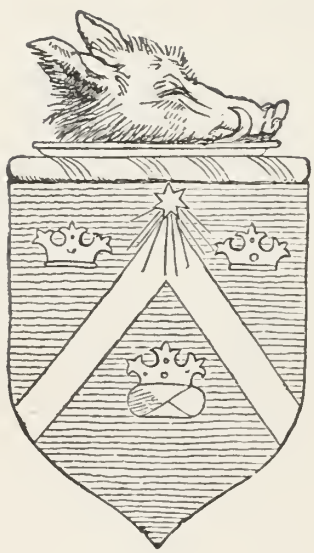

Twelfth-Night.

Amongst the pleasant anniversaries which a new year brings with it, comes the ever-welcome Century Festival. This event, so interesting to loyal Centurians, took place, as usual, on Twelfth-Night, sixth of January, which this year fell upon Thursday evening. It was attended with all the ceremonies peculiar to this festival, one of which is the ceremony of electing a Queen; it being common to both May-day and Twelfth-Night, and one that throws a brighter veil of poetry over these holidays than characterizes any other days on the festive calendar. It is unnecessary to recapitulate the attractions of the Century rooms; the elegant saloon and charming ladies' boudoir were as beautiful and impressive as the year before, nor is it incumbent on us to state that an immense crowd of fair ladies, in tasteful and rich costume, imparted more life and brilliancy to the saloon than black coats do in a business or convivial

meeting. Several smaller rooms were thrown open, and used as dressing rooms, conversation rooms, etc. We cannot avoid noticing, however, out of our sensitiveness for pictorial features, that one of the most beautiful, as well as peculiar effects of this brilliant assemblage, was to be seen in its perfection only by those loyal subjects and guests who gathered in the great room at an early hour, or who lingered in or around the dance after the midnight hour had somewhat thinned the apartments. It is most happily described by a writer in a contemporary journal (*The Home Journal*), with the feeling and judgment of one alike skilled in female beauty and in the magic effects of light and color. In his words: "While the grand saloon was filling, the effect was marvellously beautiful—the elegant dresses of the fashion and beauty of the city telling with great value and relief against the crimson background. Single figures and combined groups—the sharp *intaglio* of a fine profile—the luminous brilliancy of full shoulders, or rounded arms—the varied and picturesquely-becoming headdresses, having a detached and picture-like impressiveness, which a room of such size and hangings can alone give."

All this is true, and "yet scarce half the truth is told." But we must proceed. Before glancing at the order of proceedings, we have to state that the lower story of the club edifice was less elaborately decorated than the year before; festoons, garlands, and variegated rosettes, intermingled with evergreens, were appended to walls, ceilings, cornices, and staircases, producing, if not so imposing an effect as middle-age trappings, yet a

social and cheerful aspect. Conspicuous among these was an immense "SALVE" in the hall facing the entrance, assuring the fair guests as they arrived that they were most cordially welcome.

The company assembled at half-past eight, and at ten o'clock the cake was cut, and passed round, one fair lady finding (by chance, undoubtedly) an emblem of eternal sovereignty—a ring—in one of the pieces of cake, and she was accordingly discovered, and announced as Queen. Some spiritual and, we think, jealous descendant of the Eastern Magi, must have presided over the revels, for one of the wisest of the wise men of the club, its president, was elected as the Queen's consort; our republican candor constrains us to say that the title of King, allowed him openly by courtesy, was traitorously coveted by some of his junior peers. We must here, by the way, mention one peculiarity of the etiquette of the Centurial Court, variant from ordinary usage, though we do not at all doubt that it is founded on the highest authority, and was adopted after profound research and grave deliberation. It is this: Her Majesty the Queen is regarded as the reigning sovereign, and receives the homage of her subjects, whilst His Majesty has only the place and honor of a King Consort, and announces and bears himself as "Her Majesty's highest and most devoted subject." The election over, and the ring having been placed on Her Majesty's finger, the Queen and King were invested with the regal insignia. A tastefully designed cap, after the fashion of that of the Doge of Venice, made of ermine and crimson velvet, surmounted by a golden orb,

was set upon His Majesty's head; a red cordon was passed over his neck, and a golden sceptre was placed in his hand. The Queen was crowned with a crimson cap, *à la grecque*, and a classic gold coronet-wreath, while the grand cross of the order of the Century, attached to a blue cordon, was suspended over her shoulder. After the robing ceremonies were completed, acclamations burst forth, and the assembly of loyal and enthusiastic subjects chanted, as if in one voice, the following anthem:

QUEEN'S ANTHEM.

Hail to our gracious queen,
Well hath she chosen been,
Hail gracious queen.
Freely we own thy sway,
Humbly our homage pay,
Gladly we all obey,
Hail gracious queen.

Honor the newly crowned,
Raise high the festive sound,
Hail gracious queen.
Here on this festive night,
Gathered to grace our rite,
Subjects we all unite,
Hail gracious queen.

Earth knows no queen like ours,
Strew, then, her path with flowers,
Hail gracious queen.

Here on our bended knee,
Homage we pay to thee,
Queen of the Century,
Hail gracious queen.

Ushers of the golden rod then approached, and presented distinguished guests, among them the ladies of our national representatives at the courts of Spain and Austria, including a number of representatives of the home court of Beauty; the whole of the court present then made a circuit before their majesties, being rapidly introduced as they passed. The presentations being over, the King and Queen arose, and, to the sound of music, led the way to the banqueting rooms below, followed by their subjects, and preceded by two high officers of state, holding golden rods, and walking backward, facing their majesties, down the grand staircase; their majesties took seats on chairs of state placed upon a dais erected behind the rich and luxuriantly spread table, upon which the customary boar's head was not forgotten. The scene that followed baffles description. No baronial hall on Christmas day, or Greek symposium could present a more animated picture. None but a combatant in the thickest of the fight could do justice to the gallantry of the cavaliers, who so eagerly pressed forward to do service for the ladies. As soon as—to use the Homeric phrase as rendered by Pope—"the rage of hunger was appeased," the King, commanding silence in the court, reminded the assemblage that, according to immemorial usage, it was their duty to offer their congratulations to the new Queen in the form of a toast, and this duty, as her majesty's first and most devoted subject, it was his proud office to discharge by proposing

"The Health of the Queen."

To this toast, Mr. P. A. Porter replied, honored by Her Majesty's commands:

As a loyal subject, standing by chance near the throne, I have been honored by Her Majesty's commands. I am instructed to thank the assembly for the enthusiasm just manifested. Her Majesty is aware that it is not usual for crowned heads to acknowledge the applause of their subjects by more than a faint smile of approval; but Her Majesty desires to begin her reign by an act of great condescension, and, moreover, she recognizes around her a roomful of sovereigns. If the loyal subjects of this realm expect an inaugural address from their gracious Queen, they are doomed to disappointment. Inaugurals are plenty—they are also dangerous. Gratitude, Her Majesty knows, has been defined to be a lively sense of benefits to come. Let a grateful people look forward, therefore, to a long future of possible favor. Some sovereigns have reigned, but have not governed; some have governed, but have not reigned (long). It is hoped that the present government will be a judicious mixture of the two sorts of rule; and, that Her Majesty's subjects on the next new year—unlike Her Majesty's subjects on the last new year—will regret that the reign (rain) is over. The future of all political authority, however, is uncertain; but I dare to exceed my instructions, and to predict that there is one authority and one empire which will suffer nothing in Her Majesty's hands—an empire that depends on neither chance nor choice—older than kingdoms or republics—that began in Eden, and is to end with the last man and the empire of her sex.

Her Majesty commanded me to be brief. I obey with reluctance; but I am instructed by the Queen to present for the acclaim of all loyal subjects, the exalted personage who sits beside her—who is alike King of Twelfth-Night and President of our little republic,—a royal President and a presiding King, who derives one set of powers from the cake, and another from the constitution. Out of respect to that constitution and to that great republic, which overshadow both our little kingdom and our little republic, I give as the next name to be honored—"*The President.*"

To this toast, which was enthusiastically received, His Majesty was graciously pleased to respond in person. But before commencing his speech he respectfully submitted to Her Majesty the Queen the propriety of conferring some high dignity upon the last orator, to which Her Majesty graciously assenting, the honors of a peerage were conferred in due form.

The King then observed, that by "the President," on this occasion, but one individual could be meant. However many might bear that title, whether in a political, financial, or literary rule, here the title could have no other in view than the President of the Century. Having known that high functionary longer than any one else, knowing him better than any one could, even as "his other self," he was bound to pronounce his eulogy. He then proceeded to recapitulate the merits and glories of the *President's* gentle government, equalling in quiet, in good nature, and in good fellowship Béranger's good King of Yvetôt, whilst he far surpassed even that classic monarch in the glories of his administration. Under his sway the arts had flourished, and the walls of hundreds of halls and saloons throughout the land glowed with the living genius of the artists of the Century; whilst on all sides noble churches, palatial residences, and commercial edifices of more than palatial magnificence, had arisen—rapid and lofty as the mountain mists, firm and solid as the mountains themselves—from the constructive skill of our architects. Letters had been fostered, and the varied talent of the members of this intellectual State poured forth in every form, from the light song or gay satire to the massy Cyclopedia. The "Century" had been recognized among the powers of the earth in the Literary Congress at Brussels, in the person of its gifted ambassador. But it was the peculiar happiness of the distinguished personage whose health had been so cordially received now to reign by a double right. It was the special praise of the greatest of the Bourbons, Henry IV., that he reigned by a double right, "by the right of conquest and the right of birth." So the President of the

Century now reigned over a loyal and loving people by the double right of popular election and the divine right of Twelfth-Night choice by the mysterious cake and ring. His majesty said that he could acknowledge but one contemporary sovereign having a similar title. This was his imperial brother the Emperor and former President of France. He then expressed a fervent wish that his brother President Buchanan might resemble himself in happy fortune, and not only pass quietly to regal honors, but have the higher happiness of receiving with them a Queen, as young, as brilliant, and as beautiful as her who now shared the Centurial throne. His Majesty then entered on a glowing though rapid view of the future fortunes of civilization under such a triple presidential royal reign. Then he said, the imperial Eagle of France would, from her Alpine perch, overshadow Italy and the Mediterranean with one wing, and bathe the pinions of the other in the wild and stormy North Sea. Then the American Eagle, hovering over the Rocky Mountains, would stretch her wide plumage from the Pacific to the Gulf of Mexico, whilst far above all, the Centurial Eagle, grasping the pallet of art in one talon, and wielding the thunderbolt of the press in the other, would soar in the very highest heaven of invention.

Here His Majesty, overpowered with the magnitude and magnificence of these conceptions, paused, and then added:

It will take these three eagles a longer time than we can now spare to wait for them to descend to the earth again from their airy height, and we have other duties to discharge. There need not be any apprehension on their account. Our eagles are exceedingly well trained and in constant practice, and will come down from their rhetorical flight very safely, and quite in time for the use of the various orators here and elsewhere who have engaged their services.

His Majesty then graciously concluded by a cordial welcome to the fair guests of the evening, wishing them long years of continued health, happiness, and beauty. Then, receiving

from the chief butler, the Hon. Mr. Sparrowgrass, the ancient massive Gov. Stuyvesant two-handled silver goblet, he requested the whole court to join in the health of "Our Fair Guests," which was drank with great applause.

To this toast Mr. W. C. Bryant responded. He said:

May it please the King, and above all, may it please the Queen. I hope it will not be regarded as a departure from strict propriety if a poet should respond to the toast just given. In all ages, from the time of Homer to this day, it is the writers of verse who have been foremost in celebrating the praise of woman. Who wrote the *Mérite des Femmes?* A poet, of course. Inasmuch, therefore, as this is one of the cases in which it does not seem to be expected that any representative of that eloquent sex will stand forth to address the assembly, I will venture to say a word or two.

I am aware that there are many of that sex, in honor of which this toast has been proposed, who regard associations like ours as hostile to their own just and proper influence. They look upon all clubs as not only selfish and exclusive, but as absolutely seditious—as so many centres of rebellion against the mildest, most beneficent, happiest and best government of which the mind can conceive—as monastic in the worst sense—combinations of men held together by the love of eating, drinking, and smoking, and contempt for the women. I beg leave to ask if there is anything in the proceedings of this evening which gives a shadow of countenance to this opinion? Of all clubs of which I have any knowledge, the Century has distinguished itself by instituting periodical and frequent festivities for the ladies' sake. Everything we see about us this evening, all the preparations for this brilliant festivity, this banquet, the music, the decorations of these halls are so many propitiatory offerings laid at the feet of woman—so many expressive and, I hope, persuasive salutations to a league of perpetual amity. When these apartments were designed and built, what idea was uppermost in the minds of those who directed the architect? I

was so to construct them as best to minister to the convenience and pleasure of those who now grace the floor as our guests.

It is related in ancient history—you will find the record in an old-fashioned book called the Spectator, which was much in the hands of our grandmothers, and which I believe has been seen by some ladies of the present generation whose tastes are decidedly antiquarian—that long ago, in a distant country, a tribe of Amazons were at war with a large army of the other sex who had encamped against them. The exigencies of the warfare, by some means, led to a truce. I am sorry that I cannot be more particular—that I cannot state the occasion and terms of the truce, nor the era and scene of these events; they are important points in history, and worthy of a careful investigation; but not being able to consult the very scarce work I have named, I must pass them over.

The history proceeds to relate, that to while away the dull hours of the truce, the contending parties paid each other occasional visits in their respective encampments. At these times the men, to divert their new acquaintances, made a rude music by clashing their swords against their bucklers, keeping regular time, and the women, not to be outdone, took their lighter weapons, their long slender arrows, and pattered on their empty helmets, which they had taken off to let their long locks flow down loose upon their shoulders. The younger of both sexes capered with delight to these sounds, until at length their leaps and other movements grew into regular dances, such as we shall have to-night, after this refection is over. At length the parties made themselves so agreeable to each other, that when the truce had expired, they could not find it in their hearts to renew the war. The truce was prolonged, and finally grew into a solid, unbroken, perpetual peace; the two tribes became blended into one, and formed a prosperous, peaceful, and highly civilized nation.

So may it perhaps be with the Century. The imperfect civilization in which it had its origin may, through the gentle influence of woman, pass into a stage of higher refinement. Ours is a barbarian institution, we acknowledge, but it may prove a transition to something better.

If our gracious Queen and her illustrious maids of honor, and the bright company of matrons and damsels who compose her court, have done us the honor to look at the programme of the evening, they have seen that for to-night there is to be no smoking in any part of the house. Let them well weigh the magnitude of the sacrifice which has been made for their sake—the "luxury of a tenth cigar" voluntarily and freely abandoned. From such a beginning what may we not hope for the future. The time may arrive, sooner perhaps than any who are here now expect, when, at some happy epoch, to be denominated in history the era of the feminine invasion, those who are now our visitors shall become the joint possessors of these apartments, and if joint possessors, they are sure to bear absolute sway; when our excellent and honored president, now our King, and the finest scholar that ever wore a crown, having voluntarily divested himself of his authority, our fair Queen, with due pomp and ceremony, and with demonstrations of rejoicing that shall shake this building from the roof to the foundation-stones, shall be installed as the Lady President of the Century, and smoking be banished, not for a single night, but forever.

And now, with the leave of our august monarch, the benefits, and bounties, and benignities of whose reign we all heartily acknowledge; and with the leave also of the royal partner of his throne, to whom our obligations are no less profound, and towards whom our loyalty, I trust, is even more enthusiastic, I take the liberty of directing the attention of the company to another subject by proposing this toast—

"The King of the Dutch, the firm and faithful ally of our gracious Queen."

Whether on principles of consanguinity or of nomenclature, or, as there is reason to believe, of actual delegation from the crown of Holland, we are unable to say, but Mr. Edgar S. Van Winkle replied to this toast:

May it please your Majesties: Whether His Majesty, the King of the Dutch, recognizes me as his minister plenipotentiary or no, I have no

doubt he will consider me as a very extraordinary ambassador. The honor you have intended to my royal master by including him as one of the principalities and powers remembered on this occasion, namely, your own royal selves, the fair sex, and the King of the Dutch, will be to him an *unheard of* gratification. Personally, I also feel proud and yet abashed at being an orator on this great event, and permitted to speak after you have listened to the echoes of the thunders of the falling ocean of Niagara, and to the master of the music of that harp, whose sighing strains and triumphant tones have become a national possession and a national pride. The compliment you have paid my sovereign will be peculiarly agreeable to him, coming from such an ancient and honorable source.

As my diplomatic labors, since my sojourn at your Majesties' court, have not been extremely arduous, I have beguiled my leisure by ransacking the archives of that stupendous monument of literature, the Century library. Fortunate in a McMullen, it needs not a Magliabachi or a Cogswell—they would be but supernumeraries in that unparalleled collection. The prosecution of my studies has convinced me that, with the exception of the imperial family of China, your Majesties' lineal predecessors extend back beyond the point that any of the royal lines in Europe or Asia can reach. Your Royal Majesty has established that fact in your elaborate history of Twelfth-Night, in which, scorning the arts of vulgar historians, whose petty and pretty ambition seems to be to invest truth with the garb of fiction, your Majesty, rising to a loftier height, has draped the naked outlines of a beautiful fiction with the romance of a more beautiful truth. May I venture to say, that, coming from some sources, truth is stranger than fiction.

Your Majesties' court also is composed of gentlemen and ladies that, for aught I know to the contrary, may claim even a pre-Adamite origin. The ladies are famous for their beauty, wit, and accomplishments, not only throughout the world, but even throughout the universe of New York; so famous, indeed, that no rational belief can ascribe their origin to any other than a celestial source. They have

undoubtedly descended from heaven, but how far I cannot tell. As to the gentlemen of your court I can only say, that if they are descended from Adam, Adam could not have been the man he is usually taken to have been.

I feel great pleasure in standing in this august presence, and witnessing the prosperity of your Majesties' kingdom. Divine right and popular election have, as your Majesty the King has said, concurred in your elevation. I say nothing of chance having caused the morsels of cake containing the rings to fall to your Majesties' possession, for I have no doubt if the walls of an adjoining committee-room had tongues, as they have ears, we would be told that, as some philosophers affirm, the doctrine of chances can be reduced to a science and a certainty.

But to recur, I cannot look upon her Majesty the Queen without acknowledging the divine right which the Creator has bestowed on his handiwork to reign over us all—her merit is *sterling*, for she was a *sovereign* before she possessed a *crown*. As to your Majesty the King, I cannot say the same thing, for it would be an unmeaning repetition; your Majesty's claim, moreover, not resting on beauty alone, but on what is in your opinion, and in that of my master, a higher distinction, namely, a current of genuine Batavian blood coursing through your veins.

My master will feel proud that his nation—famous for its statesmen, its scholars, and its artists—has furnished a King of Twelfth Night, who is in one a statesman and a scholar, and possesses that appreciative admiration of Art which is so necessary to the life of Art itself. May the Century prove more grateful for this gift than your Majesties' barbarian neighbors east of the Byram River have proved to be for the inestimable gifts of town meetings, common schools, and thanksgiving days, which Holland so freely bestowed upon them.

But I am growing grave, and fear ~~any~~ constitutional seriousness may mar the general hilarity. I therefore conclude, by wishing to your majesties long life and prosperity, by hoping that the many estimable qualities of your male subjects, which are unknown either to themselves or others, may in due time be brought to light, and astonish

the world, and the charms of your ladies, unsurpassed and unsurpassable as they are, may continue to increase, if that be possible—may bloom and blossom in luxuriant beauty, may be enduring and perennial, and extend their bright influence far beyond *this* Century.

But little more remains to be added. Absorbed as we were in listening to the eloquence just reported, we could not be present in the saloon above, where our able knight of the quill previously quoted seems to have retreated; he says, "To divide the interest, and give more room while the graver ones were listening to eloquent adulation, the younger members were assiduously courting Terpsichore in the grand saloon, where the twinkling feet braided footsteps till the witching hours were fled far away." Yielding to his observation for a report of the ceremonies in honor of Terpsichore, we add to our account of the joyous festivity a list of the works of Art displayed upon the walls, and contributed for the occasion, in addition to those belonging to the club. There were "Sunset in South America," by Mignot; "Twelfth Night," by Lang; a fine copy of an Ostade, by Chapman; "Moonlight," by Gignoux; "The Wadsworth Oak, Genesee Valley," by Kensett; "Normandy Coast Scene," by Dana; "The Sacred Lesson," by Huntington; "Birds and Dogs," by Hays; "Joan of Arc," "Roman Girl," "Sibyl," and "Nydia," by Lang; "Nurse and Child," by Leutze; "Sketching Flowers," an ideal, by Huntington; "Children's heads," and a cabinet picture, by Rossiter; "An Evening Scene," by Suydam; "Governor Peter Stuyvesant," and "Governor John Winthrop," the representatives of our mixed race, the one as the most dis-

tinguished of the Dutch governors, and the other of the first English colonial governors; "Dr. Kane," by Hicks; and two landscapes by Kensett. In the Ladies' Boudoir were "Bashbish Fall," by Kensett; "Quail chickens," by Tait, and other small pieces.

We must not close our report of this bright festival without informing our readers, that for much of the brilliancy and effective decoration of the apartments, the guests were indebted to the practised and artistic eyes and voluntary labors of three or four artist members; while the banquet-rooms, etc., bore equal evidence to the science and taste of the sub-committee, under whose direction it was prepared, consisting of two gentlemen skilled alike in the learning and the luxury of the table.

The Century Club may now be fully congratulated on the perfect success of their spirited endeavor, begun in 1856, to revive in this over-worked and care-worn city, "the love and honor (as the official report of last year's centurial Twelfth-Night expressed it) due to this joyous ancient festival, with its poetical and reverential associations and its picturesque and pleasant usages, which had for ages annually contributed to the innocent enjoyment and social affections of the mixed ancestry of cosmopolitan New York."

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